



BOARD OF VISITORS

THE VIRGINIA SCHOOL FOR THE DEAF AND THE BLIND

P.O. BOX 2069

STAUNTON, VA 24402-2069

Senator Emmett W. Hanger, Jr.
Board Chairman

VSDB BOV Meeting
September 25, 2013
VSDB Main Hall Boardroom
Meeting Minutes

Senator Hanger called the meeting to order at 12:50 pm welcoming board members and guests.

Roll call of members present and introductions of all people in room.

Members present: Senator Hanger, Senator Favola, Del. Bell, Del. Wilt, Rachel Bavister, Donna Gateley, Jane McNeil, John Pleasants, Virgil Cook.

Members absent: Alice Frick, Diane Sandidge

Senator Hanger declared a quorum.

Also in attendance: John Eisenberg, Virginia Department of Education; Cameron O'Brion, Assistant Attorney General; Wendell Roberts, Attorney General's office

Mr. O'Brion introduced Wendell Roberts, the new counsel for VSDB from the Attorney General's office.

Reading and approval of June 27, 2013 minutes

Mr. Pleasants moved that the minutes be accepted. The motion passed.

Reports

Video of VSDB classrooms:

Pat Trice, principal, and Keith VanFossen, assistant principal in the Blind Department, presented a slide show of current students who need high levels of assistance; some have mobility disabilities in addition to deafness, blindness, or deaf/blindness. Interveners are specially trained individuals who work with Deaf/Blind students. They allow for interaction between the Deaf/Blind student and his/her environment. Teacher Assistants (TA) are staff either assigned to a classroom or to a student for extra support.

Senator Favola asked how many VSDB students need an intervener. Currently VSDB has five (5) students who require an intervener. A student must qualify for an intervener; so not all Deaf/Blind students have one.

Currently 73% of students enrolled at VSDB have multiple disabilities in addition to a primary disability of deaf/hard of hearing, blind/visually impaired. Behavior staff are trained and

available to assist with student incidents. They work to calm students who are overwhelmed and to return them to the classroom.

John Pleasants asked what happens to Deaf/Blind students who cannot attend VSDB. The local school district is responsible for providing services.

Best Practices Report:

Mr. John Ringer with the Department of Planning and Budget presented a PowerPoint presentation (Attachment) on the Best Management Practices Study conducted at VSDB from August to December 2012. Since 1980, enrollment at VSDB has dropped by 80%. Other schools with similar programs have also experienced declines.

Senator Favola and Senator Hanger asked if the rising cost of educating special education students at VSDB was in line with the state's cost of educating similarly disabled students in public schools. John Eisenberg with the Virginia Department of Education responded that he would look into this. They also asked about possible causes for the decline in enrollment. The response was that one cause could be that students who live too far away to attend daily do not want to be in a residential program, and another cause could be the implementation of IDEA.

The study showed VSDB student/teacher ratio to be 3 to 1. In comparison to other state schools for deaf and blind, four (4) had a similar 3-to-1 ratio, three (3) had a ratio of 4 to 1, and three (3) had a ratio of 5 to 1.

The VSDB student/non-teaching ratio was 1 to 1. In comparison to other state schools for deaf and blind, three (3) had a similar 1 to 1 ratio, two (2) had a 2 to 1 ratio, one (1) had a 4 to 1 ratio, and one (1) had a 16 to 1 ratio.

Delegate Bell asked if the deaf blind schools that were compared to VSDB had a similar percent of students with multiple disabilities; Mr. Ringer acknowledged that the study team did not know.

The study presented several options to save money and to utilize resources better. Mr. Ringer acknowledged that Dr. Armstrong has been trying to find tenants for the unused buildings and that VSDB has recently signed a contract with the state real estate office to facilitate the renting of unused buildings. Currently, there are no interested parties. Senator Favola suggested approaching area governmental units about renting space in these vacant buildings.

Several recommendations emerged from the report. First, that the Superintendent delegate authority so that fewer people report to her. Second, that the bus routes be analyzed to determine whether changing some routes would reduce cost.

Senator Hanger thanked Mr. Ringer for his presentation and responded that a school efficiency review conducted by a private consulting group would be advisable.

APA Report:

Deanne Compton with the Auditor of Public Accounts reported on findings and answered questions. She said that with staffing changes the audit took longer than originally planned. Janice Rankin, VSDB Director of Operations, was available to explain the action that VSDB has taken in reference to the audit findings and recommendations.

Budget: Ms. Janice Rankin

Ms. Rankin showed two maps to the Board, a land use map and a flood plain map. These maps show the proposed use and locations of flood plains and are based on the Master Plan previously approved by the Board. Senator Favola moved to accept the exhibits as presented. The motion passed.

Ms. Rankin presented four (4) decision packages to the Board. The decision packages had to be submitted before the meeting of the Board and were approved by the Secretary of Education, Ms. Fornash.

1. Restoration of prior budget reductions. Senator Favola moved to approve. The motion passed.
2. Mandates, additional funds to cover the increased costs in utilities and service contracts brought on by new facilities.
3. New general fund spending initiatives for the Competent Learner Model curriculum for sensory impaired students with autism and intellectual disabilities.
4. Other spending or initiatives, replace worn out equipment for maintenance.

Dr. Cook moved to approve packages 2, 3, and 4. The motion passed.

Senator Hanger requested that in the future a special committee or the executive committee hold a meeting to approve decision packages if due before BOV meetings. The Board concurred.

The school is 5% over budget at the end of August. This is normal due to the large number of bills that are paid during the first quarter of the fiscal year. The school will receive reimbursement for summer school costs from the VSDB Foundation.

Human Resources: Mr. Nate McLamb

Mr. McLamb reported that the current trend in student applications received is mostly for children with significant support needs in addition to deaf/hard of hearing, blind/visual impairments. Additional staffing is required to support students with these types of significant needs. Students are being placed on a waiting list due to lack of appropriate staffing levels.

Eighteen (18) positions will be left open due to budget cuts, with approximately \$400,000 in savings. Four (4) positions are in current recruitment. When the two schools were consolidated, VSDB was given 45 positions to compensate for the additional students with multiple disabilities

that would be enrolling. Eight (8) positions have been permanently dropped, and 18 are held open for budget. Of the additional positions given to VSDB 60% are not viable.

School report: Ms. Pat Trice

Ms. Trice reported that the start of school has gone well and that routines are developing. There are requests for admission that are still being reviewed. Many of the classrooms are full. Therefore, VSDB cannot accept additional students for those classes.

Senator Favola asked if the school is utilizing all of the Federal money that is available. John Eisenberg responded that it is. Medicaid is billed for students. A follow-up report of the uses of Medicaid and the money needed to support students should be discussed in the next BOV meeting.

Superintendent's report: Dr. Nancy Armstrong

Dr. Armstrong reported that she has had conversations with Secretary Fornash and Mr. Eisenberg about the changing mission of VSDB. She would like to arrange a meeting consisting of Senator Hanger, Secretary Fornash, Mr. Eisenberg and herself in the near future to continue discussions on the mission of VSDB.

A VSDB promotional video, funded by the VSDB Foundation, has been produced to help educate the state community about VSDB.

The school bluegrass band performed at a local event. The music program was given instruments, a sound system for the auditorium and \$1000. The students are very excited about the music program.

The VSDB Foundation has also provided the funding for a part-time horticulture position. The horticulture program continues to grow and the partnership with the Allegheny Mountain School (AMS) provides an additional person in the form of a Fellow that assists the VSDB staff. There are plans to plant a working garden on 2.5 acres. AMS will provide three (3) Fellows to help run and take care of the garden.

Based on the new requirement for ninth graders to have a virtual credit to graduate, there have been discussions with VDOE about VSDB's providing virtual classes to public schools. George Mason University (GMU) has provided VSDB with equipment to make virtual classes possible.

VSDB has received a \$93,000 grant to expand the emergency system on campus. As part of the consolidation project, all new and renovated buildings have been equipped with an emergency notification system. Old buildings were not included. This grant will be used to incorporate the old buildings to the system.

Dr. Armstrong challenged the Board to become involved with the effort to make sure deaf/hard of hearing, blind/visually impaired, and Deaf/Blind students are not left behind.

Mr. Eisenberg recommended that VSDB be included on the Superintendent's Memo that is sent out once a year about facilities that are available.

New Business

Director of Special Education:

Dr. Patricia Devitt, Augusta County Director of Pupil Service, expressed to the Board the frustration of trying to send a child to VSDB only to be informed that the student cannot be accepted because of staffing and budget constraints. Extended school year services for VSDB students is another issue that needs to be addressed.

Authorization for VSDB Police Department:

The official authorization of the two police officers, who are already on campus, is necessary to comply with the law. Mr. Pleasants moved to approve the VSDB Police Department. The motion passed.

Authorization of Signature in Absence of Division Superintendent:

This form provides for other employees of VSDB to sign on behalf of the Superintendents when she is absent. Currently Nate McLamb and Janice Rankin are approved. This form adds Pat Trice. Mr. Pleasants moved to authorize the addition of Pat Trice. The motion passed.

Dr. Cook requested that the agenda for the next meeting include a discussion of the pros and cons of VSDB remaining a state agency and not a school.

Public comment:

The Board was asked about future plans to increase enrollment. This will be an agenda item for the next meeting.

Next meeting:

The tentative date of the next BOV meeting is Thursday, December 12 at 10:00 am in the board room of Main Hall. Board members will be polled about the best time to start future meetings.

Executive Session:

In accordance with Virginia code 2.2- 3711(A) 1: John Pleasants moved to go into a closed, executive session of the Board to review the recommendations of the Executive Committee on the Evaluation of the Superintendent. The motion passed. The Board went into executive session.

Immediately following the executive session, Senator Hanger moved to end the session. The motion passed.

Senator Hanger polled the Board members to confirm that only items related to the evaluation of the Superintendent were discussed during the executive session. Each Board member affirmed. Mr. Pleasants moved to approve the Superintendent's evaluation. One member abstained. The motion passed.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 4:00 pm.

Minutes approved December 20, 2013